

## *Visualizing Trauma in Postwar French Cinema*

### **Course Description:**



In this upper-division course we will examine, through documentary and fictional films, the question of postwar trauma experienced on both the individual and national level. How does one represent, visually and verbally, a traumatic experience that resists clear articulation? Traumatic events, obscured by pain or shame, are often deeply repressed and their examination unsettles our understanding of the past and the concepts of memory, history and representation. The works of such eminent French filmmakers as Alain Renais, Marcel Ophüls, François Truffaut, Louis Malle, and Bertrand Tavernier, among others, revisit the painful

issues of daily hardship, the horrors of war, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, Resistance and Collaboration, the Occupation and “Vichy syndrome.” Throughout the course, we will see how repressed memories re-emerge on the screen and re-enter the national consciousness, how memory turns into history and how the reconstruction of the past affects our present.

### **Course Readings and Films:**

Greene, Naomi. *Landscapes of Loss: the National Past in Postwar French Cinema*.

Course Reader

*Night and Fog* (1955, Alain Renais)

*Hiroshima mon amour* (1959, Alain Renais)

*The Sorrow and the Pity* (1971, Marcel Ophüls)

*Le dernier métro* (1980, François Truffaut)

*Lacombe Lucien* (1974, Louis Malle)

*Au Revoir Les Enfants* (1987, Louis Malle)

*Capitaine Conan* (1996, Bertrand Tavernier)

*Un héros très discret* (1996, Jacques Audiard)

*Lucie Aubrac* (1997, Claude Berri)

### **Course Objectives:**

There are two principal objectives for this course. First, it aims to deepen your awareness of questions concerning the representation of traumatic events, in particular of how WWII is visualized in French Cinema. Second, it seeks to refine your skills in critical thinking, reading, film viewing and writing. What lies at the heart of critical inquiry are not the answers we may find, but the questions we ask. This is to say that by means of active engagement with texts and films, by asking questions as we read and view them, we can improve our ability to analyze and relate them to a wider critical discourse. Class discussions and writing assignments are designed to help you elaborate your thoughts and reactions.

### **Course Requirements:**

1. ATTENDANCE: This class will move at a brisk pace. If you MUST be absent, let me know in advance; you will need to provide a written proof for your absences. Take down the e-mail address of several classmates so that you can inquire about assigned readings and material that you miss. *I will not respond to emails asking me what the next assignment is.*

2. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION: 20% of your grade is based on your work in class, a combination of ability, attentiveness and overall effort. Most of all, this class requires active engagement with the material: all students are expected to come to class well-prepared and to participate regularly in class discussions. *The seminar's success depends on your active participation!*

3. READING ASSIGNMENTS AND FILM VIEWINGS: All the assigned readings must be carefully read. Take notes and write down questions while you read in order to ask them during class discussions. All films must be viewed in their entirety prior to the first day of their discussion. Copies of the films can be found in the Kerr Video Lab (Kerr Hall, Room 2160). Take notes as you watch them. *There will be unannounced mini-quizzes on the content of assigned films.*

4. ORAL PRESENTATION: To encourage active participation, each student will give a brief oral presentation (5-7 minutes) on one of the films or secondary readings. I will pass a sign-up sheet during the first week of classes to assure that everybody has a chance to choose the topic they find most appealing.

5. SHORT PAPER: (3-4 pages, double space) **Tuesday, 5/4.** You will need to familiarize yourself with cinematic terminology and critical approaches to writing on films. This paper will consist of a cinematic analysis of a selected sequence from one of the films viewed during the course. It provides me with a chance to give you feedback early on. It also intends to prepare you for the final paper.

6. MID-TERM EXAM: **Thursday, 4/22.** If you **MUST** be absent, let me know in advance to make proper arrangements for you to take the exam outside of the classroom. *A written proof for your absence is required.*

7. FINAL PAPER: (6-7 pages, double space) You will gradually work through the process of developing the final paper: a brief statement of your proposed paper topic along with a detailed prospective outline is due on **Thursday, 5/20.** In the final paper you should tie in some of the secondary readings with an extensive analysis of one of the films. I will schedule individual meetings with all of you after submission of the thesis statement and outline to help you sharpen the focus of your work. The final paper is due on **Tuesday, 6/8 by 4:00 pm** at the main office (5206 Phelps).

*Please, save your written assignments on a diskette or any other form of electronic back-up system you prefer.*

**Final Grade Calculation:**

Attendance and active participation	20%
Oral presentation	10%
Short paper	15%
Mid-term exam	25%
Outline & thesis statement	5%
Final paper	25%

**Grading Scale:**

93	A	77-73	C
92-91	A-	72-71	C-
90-88	B+	70-68	D+
87-83	B	67-63	D
82-81	B-	62-60	D-
80-78	C+	59 and under	F